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SUBJECT Interview with Margaret Papandreou

BRYANT GUMBEL: Margaret Papandreou, the wife of the Prime Minister of Greece, is well known for her strong feelings about Greek-American relations and about feminism in her own country. Recently, our chief Washington correspondent Judy Woodruff had a chance to talk with Mrs. Papandreou.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Thank you, Mrs. Papandreou, for being with us this morning.

The government run by your husband, the Prime Minister, has given the impression that it is anti-American. What is the attitude of the Greek government toward the United States?

MARGARET PAPANDREOU: At this point, as you know, probably, we are engaged in a negotiation on the American bases in Greece. And therefore we are having a period of time in which we are feeling each other out, you might say.

There is no anti-American feeling on the part of this Greek government. There is a pro-Greek feeling. You might put it that way. That is, we try to operate in the interest of our country. And, in fact, we believe those interests, in operating that way, are indeed in the interest of the United States as well.

WOODRUFF: Will those American bases in Greece all remain where they are?

MRS. PAPANDREOU: Well, at this point, I'm not in a position to say, because there is a process of negotiation going on. And therefore it is a period of time that we are mum on the subject.

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WOODRUFF: Your husband's administration is socialist, of course. And yet, an American news report that I'm going to quote from recently described him as the fiery orator who promised a contract for the people when he campaigned for office a year and a half ago, but who has emerged instead as a traditional Greek patriarch, keeping power tightly centralized in his own hands.

How do you react to that?

MRS. PAPANDREOU: You know, when we took over the government, we took over a situation which was very archaic, which was very lacking in a modern style of operation, which, I think, for a certain period of time needed a very firm hand. And Andreas had a vision, he has a vision. And therefore he wanted to set the course in the right direction.

There is a very deep process of decentralization going on, however. And it's not easy. Remember, we're in government for only about 18 months. And there was a very centralized and inefficient bureaucracy. And to break those things down and to put power in the hands of the people, which is our aim, is not easy, but it's being done.

WOODRUFF: Your husband is also given credit for increasing civil liberties. You played a major role in advancing women's rights. How would you describe the main difference between the status of Greek women and American women?

MRS. PAPANDREOU: We are somewhat behind, as yet. There are not that many differences in terms of the problems and the status of women in the United States and in Greece. But we are just, let's say, in time, something like 15 years behind. We are moving ahead and there has been a dramatic change in terms of the legal aspects of the rights of women. And this is...

WOODRUFF: For example.

MRS. PAPANDREOU: The change in the family code. The family code was a code that represented a patriarchal mentality. The man was the head of the family, the man made all the decisions. In fact, he had all the rights over the children, as well. Now there are equal rights in the family. Decisions are made by comment dissent [sic]. As I say, these are legal, legal rights.

The reality, that is, is that probably there's been no great change in the head of the household from one day to the next, from the time the law went through. But we have the base now. And the changing of the mentality will take some time.

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WOODRUFF: As an American woman who has lived away from this country for more than a decade, what changes do you see for American women now?

MRS. PAPANDREOU: For American women in America?

WOODRUFF: That's right.

MRS. PAPANDREOU: What do I see, coming back? It is clear, from the superficial point of view -- that is, from what one can see and judge -- that women have begun to move into higher positions of power. I think this is the major change that I sense in this country. I don't believe they have reached, to any great degree, positions of power in the higher level. But they are moving up into the medium-level positions of power. And this is a very, very good sign, I think.

WOODRUFF: You're going back to your hometown. Is it in Illinois?

MRS. PAPANDREOU: Yes.

WOODRUFF: How do you expect to be received there, as the wife of a head of state in another country?

MRS. PAPANDREOU: I hope they receive me as Maggie Champ the ex-basketball player of Elmhurst, Illinois. I think...

WOODRUFF: But you didn't make the basketball team.

MRS. PAPANDREOU: No, I didn't make the boys basketball team, which I had tried for a time. This is true.

WOODRUFF: Thank you very much for being with us, Mrs. Papandreou.